EUPHORIA

"TROUBLE DON'T LAST ALWAYS"

"PART ONE: RUE"

Written by

Sam Levinson

FADE IN:

OVER BLACK

“SO ALONE” by LABRINTH plays TWO VERSES, then:

CUT TO:

INT. RUE AND JULES’ SUDIO APARTMENT - NEW YORK - MORNING

JULES, alone, sleeping on top of the COVERS in BED, BACK TO THE CAMERA. TOPLESS, wearing BLUE PANTIES. The window is open, we can HEAR BIRDS CHIRPING and the BUSY NEW YORK TRAFFIC down below.

The ROOM GETS BRIGHTER and WARMER. Then:

INTO FRAME: RUE TENDERLY KISSING JULES’ BODY. Starting from her hips, her waist, her ribs -- Jules is waking -- her arm, her shoulder, her ear, her cheek, her nose...

JULES
(smiling)
Hi.

RUE
Hi.

They kiss more.

JULES
Oh, wait. Don’t kiss me. I just woke up.

RUE
(kissing Jules’ neck, face, lips)
No, it doesn’t matter they’re good luck kisses.

JULES
(gasps)
Oh, fuck. Wait. My presentation.

RUE
What?

JULES
Wait, what time is it?

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RUE
You’re good. You’re good. You’re good. It’s eight.

Rue continues tenderly kissing Jules in between conversation.

JULES
Okay.

RUE
You’re good.

JULES
I’m so fuckin nervous.

RUE
You got it.

JULES
I can’t fuck this up.

RUE
You’re gonna be amazing.

BEAT

RUE (CONT'D)
Want me to walk you to school?

JULES
Mm, I think I wanna listen to music and clear my head, okay? But I love you.

RUE
(chuckles)
I love you, too.

The kissing turns passionate, but only for SECONDS. Jules moans, but she has to get ready.

RUE (CONT'D)
Go, go.

Jules gets up and walks to the bathroom and Rue remains in bed; watching Jules.

BATHROOM

Standing in front of the bathroom MIRROR, Jules FIXES HER HAIR, BRUSHES HER TEETH. Still wearing only LIGHT BLUE PANTIES. Her slender body glowing in the warm sun. Rue watches. Jules looks at Rue, who WAVES. Jules SMILES.

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Rue gets up from the bed and walks up behind Jules. Rue puts her arms around Jules' waist and gives her a hug.

RUE (CONT'D)
You know whatever happens today,
I'm proud of you.

MONTAGE OVER MUSIC:

- Jules getting dressed.

- Jules sorting through DESIGNS in her PORTFOLIO for the presentation.

- Rue helping.

- Kissing, embracing, loving the moment.

INT. RUE AND JULES' APARTMENT - NEW YORK - LATER

KITCHEN/FRONT DOOR

SCENE IS ONE SINGLE CONTINUOUS SHOT

JULES
Can you believe it?
(whispers)
It's everything we dreamed of.
(they kiss)

Jules grabs her portfolio and leaves.

RUE
I love you.

BEDROOM AREA

Rue closes the door. She walks back to the bed, slips her hand under the mattress, and retrieves TWO PILLS WRAPPED IN PLASTIC. From the DESK BESIDE THE BED, she finds a HARD-COVER BOOK, A SNORTING STRAW, and a ONE-DOLLAR BILL.

BATHROOM

Rue comes into the bathroom and sets the paraphernalia on the closed toilet seat. Rue sits on the edge of the TUB, opposite the toilet. Rue puts the two TABLETS on the HARDCOVERBOOK, COVERS THEM WITH THE DOLLAR BILL. Then, using the BUTT of her CIGARETTE LIGHTER, Rue crushes the two pills into granular. SNORTS.

CUT TO:

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INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - NIGHT

BATHROOM

Rue looks at her reflection in the mirror. She checks around, and in, her nose for any evidence of her snorting pills. Satisfied, she walks out.

CAMERA FOLLOWS as Rue makes her way through the **DINING ROOM** and rejoins her sponsor, ALI, at the BOOTH BY THE WINDOW. He's dressed CASUAL and WEARING AN ALL BLACK KUFI HAT. They sit opposite each other. Ali is eating PANCAKES; Rue has barely touched her own serving of PANCAKES.

CAMERA TRACKS TO MCU - RUE

RUE
Look, Ali, I know you don't believe me, but I'm ... I'm doing really good, actually.

ALI
Is that so?

RUE
Yeah. Yeah, for sure. I mean, it, you know, could suddenly shit flip and get super dark? Yeah, you know. I mean, it could, but ... I feel like I've found this, like, amazing balance, where I'm like happy and healthy, and I'm not, like ... looking to anybody else for that happiness you know? Fuckin' Jules. The way I was, like, way too much of my emotional well-being in her hands, you know, without ever, like, talking about it, or, or saying it. I -- especially the was I was fuckin' making plans for the rest of our life and shit. And I just -- and I look back and I'm just, like, why the fuck did I do that? It's fuckin' crazy. And weird. Eh, I don't know. I guess I just, like, made *her* the point. But she's, like, not the point. I'm the point, you know?

ALI
Hmmph. The point is your sobriety.

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RUE
Yeah. Of course, yeah. And -- and, like, my -- my general overall well-being.

ALI
Which starts with your sobriety.

RUE
Yeah. Mm-hmmm. And, like, finding and emotional balance, you know?

ALI
You just said you found an *amazing* balance.

RUE
I ... I did. I have. I, I mean, but I'm not perfect, you know, so -- I'm, I'm sane, though. Like, I'm sane. Saner. I'm making *sane* ... decisions.

ALI
Rue.
(beat)
You're high.

RUE
(chuckles)
I feel like you're not listening to what I'm saying.

ALI
Rue, I don't think you're listening to what you're saying.

RUE
I feel like that's physically impossible.

ALI
To what? Talk some bullshit?

RUE
(scoffs, chuckles)
Huh. You know, that's what, like, I don't understand about the world. 'Cause, like, thee is tons of people, who, you know, drink and do drugs and sometimes their life is good.
(a mouthful of pancakes)
(MORE)

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RUE (CONT'D)
And sometimes, life's just bad, you know? It's fucking life. There's ups and downs to this shit, but, I men, whether you believe me or not, I'm, like -- I'm good.

ALI
Yeah, yeah, you said that.

RUE
Yeah, I mean, it's not like I'm going a bunch of shit. I'm just smoking a little bit of weed, and taking some pills that were prescribed to me.

ALI
My point is, it's not going to last.

RUE
Yeah, well, neither do my moods when I'm sober.

ALI
Okay, well, you know, I'm not saying you're, um, a paragon of mental health. You've got your issues, and you're gonna be struggling with those issues for the rest of your life. That's a fact. The problem is, is that you look at sobriety as a weakness in the face of those issues, and what I'm saying is, sobriety is your greatest weapon.

RUE
(scoffs)
Yeah.

BEAT

RUE (CONT'D)
Ali, can I tell you something?

ALI
Yeah.

RUE
Like, for real, if ... if I say some dark shit, you're not gonna report me to the state or something?

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ALI
Uh, Rue, I'm not a guidance counselor. I'm just a crackhead who's trying to do a little good on this Earth before I die.

Ali and Rue share a laugh.

RUE
Uh, you're a -- you're a trip, man.

ALI
What were you going to say?

RUE
Ah. It doesn't matter. It's stupid.

ALI
All right, I'm sorry. Come on. What were you gonna say? Say it.

RUE
Nah, I don't wanna.

ALI
Say it.

Rue takes a sip from her GLASS OF ORANGE JUICE.

BEAT

RUE
Um. When I'm, uh, when I'm clean, you know, when I'm present, uh, like a part of this world, I don't just think about relapsing. It's, uh, darker than that. And, uh, you can say that sobriety is my, uh, greatest weapon, but -- to tell you the truth, drugs are probably the only reason I haven't killed myself.

ALI
Oh.
(beat)
Now we're talkin'. Now you're being real. Now you're being honest. Because this whole bullshit about being a functioning drug addict, about *finding balance*, that's ain't true. That's a lie.

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RUE
It’s not a lie.

ALI
It’s a lie, whether you know it or not -- but more importantly, I don’t give a fuck to hear it.

RUE
(scoffs)
Yeah, whatever, man.

ALI
Whatever, man?

RUE
(chuckles, scoffs)

ALI
Whatever, man. Listen, young blood, I was shooting dope before your mama’s egg dropped. I've lived a whole motherfuckin' life to get to this diner to sit across from your arrogant ass, so don't you ever *whatever* me. You're 17. You don't know shit. You think you're hard? I'm harder. You think you're tough? I'm tougher. You got clean and want to kill yourself? Same motherfuckin' story here. You want to know why? You want to know why? I'll tell you why. 'Cause you don't know how to live life. You don't have the tools. You're too busy running around, trying to bullshit everybody into thinking you're hard, and you don't give a fuck, when in reality, you give so much of a fuck, you can't even bear to be alive. So guess what? New rule. No more wasting my motherfuckin' time. You wanna use? Use. But the least you can do is be honest. Own that shit.

RUE
(softly)
Okay.

Rue feels like a chastised child. Caught red-handed.

ALI
You feel me?

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RUE
Yep.

BEAT

ALI
Why’d you relapse?

RUE
I don’t know. Couldn’t stop my mind from racing.

ALI
Racing about what?

RUE
Everything.

ALI
Hey, hey. Be specific.

Rue considers the question, and her answer. Then:

RUE
All the things I remember and all the things I wish I didn't.

ALI
Okay. I get it. Why didn’t you call me?

RUE
(scoffs)
Just ... honestly, I wasn't really trying *not* to relapse.

ALI
(chuckles)
Yeah. Man. Okay. Where'd you get the drugs?

RUE
I had some pills for emergency purposes.

ALI
Fuck. So you never stood a chance.

RUE
Nope.

ALI
Do you wanna get clean?

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RUE
No.

ALI
You sure?

RUE
(shrugs, then quietly)
Yep.

ALI
(exhales)
I get it. I get it.

RUE
Is that fucked up?

ALI
What? That you don't want to get clean? Yeah, yeah. Of course it's fucked up.

RUE
Ah. I'm a piece of shit, huh?

ALI
Yeah, yeah, yeah. You're a piece of shit. You're a piece of shit. All right? But here's the silver lining. You're not a drug addict *because* you're a piece of shit. You're a piece of shit *because* you're a drug addict. You follow?

RUE
Mm, I don't really ...

ALI (CONT'D)
Okay, all right, what I'm saying is ...

ALI (CONT'D)
... you didn't come out of the womb an evil person. You, Rue, came out of the womb a beautiful baby girl, who unbeknownst to her, had a couple of wires crossed. So when you tried drugs for the first time, it, uh, set something off in your brain that's beyond your control. And it isn't a question of willpower. It's not about how strong you are. You've been fighting a losing game since the first day you got high.
(MORE)

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ALI (CONT'D)
So you can destroy your life, you can fuck your little sister's head up, you can abuse and torture and take for granted your mama, and sit here and look me in the eye, and say, as calm as can be, as cool as a cucumber, "*Imma keep usin' drugs*."
(scoffs)
Ha! *That* --- is the disease of addiction. It is a degenerative disease. It is incurable. It is deadly. And it's no different than cancer. And you got it. Why? Mm. Luck of the draw. But, hey, but the hardest part of having the disease of addiction, aside from having the disease, is that no one in the world sees it as a disease. They see you as selfish. They see you as weak. They see you as cruel. They see you as, uh, destructive. They think, why should I give a fuck about her if she doesn't give a fuck about herself or anybody else? Why does this girl deserve my time, my patience, my sympathy? Right? If she wants to kill herself, let her. All reasonable questions and responses. But luckily, you aren't the only person on planet Earth who has this disease. There happens to be people like me, who understand that -- you aren't all that bad. Probably underneath all this busted-ass, chaotic energy, you might even be a good kid. Who knows? And that is why we are eating pancakes on Christmas Eve. Despite the fact that you don't want to get clean.

EXT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

An unawkward silence fills the air. A BLACK VEHICLE rolls through the parking lot. The pavement is WET. Frank’s parking lot has only TWO VEHICLES. One of them is Ali’s FORD PICK-UP.

Rue to breaks the silence.

RUE (O.C.)
You have daughters, right?

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ALI (O.C.)
Mm-hmmm.

RUE (O.C.)
Where are they?

INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

ALI
Different places, celebrating with their families.

RUE
Mm. You see them often?

ALI
(chuckles wryly)
I've never declined an invitation.

RUE
Wait, but haven't you been, like, clean for twenty years?

ALI
Nah, nah. I was clean for *seven* years.

RUE
Wait, really?

ALI
Yeah, well, I had twelve years before that, but you know, I got cocky. Started to walk around thinking I was invincible. So, now I got seven years.

RUE
Oh, shit.

ALI
Right.

RUE
Wait. How do you ... how do you relapse after twelve years?

ALI
You forget how bad it is.

RUE
Damn. How, how long did you relapse for?

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ALI
A ... year and a half.

RUE
Oh, fuck.

ALI
Yeah, fuck. Yeah. Right.

RUE
Oh, shit. Damn. I thought, I thought you were gonna say, like, a day or something.

ALI
Nah, nah. Once you get back in that cycle, you know, using and abusing, it's inescapable. Especially if you've been clean for 12 years. That's when the disease starts talking. "*Twelve years, Martin, and you ain't never getting that far again*."

Wait a second. *Who?*

RUE
Wait. Martin?

ALI
(chuckles)
Uh -- yeah.

RUE
Who’s Martin?

ALI
Martin is me.

RUE
(genuinely confused)
What?

ALI
My name.

RUE
Your name is Martin?

ALI
Well, used to be.

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RUE
(totally confused)
What?

ALI
Before I converted.

RUE
To what?

ALI
To Islam.

RUE
Ali, I'm super fucking confused right now.

ALI
What am I, your first Black friend?

RUE
(laughs)

ALI
What'd you think, I was actually from the Middle East? I'm from south Philly.

RUE
Yeah, but you, you just don't, you don't *look* like a Martin. You don’t.

ALI
(chuckles)
I didn't think so, either.

RUE
Do women ever convert to Islam?

ALI
Very few.

RUE
Mm.

BEAT

RUE (CONT'D)
You know, it's interesting, 'cause, like... It's kind of what I struggle with.

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ALI
What do mean?

RUE
The N.A. shit. Step one ... I -- I'm cool with. Like, you know, I, I can, I can agree, you know, I'm powerless over drugs, and my life is unmanageable. That's not, like, fucking inconceivable.

ALI
Right, right.

RUE
But, um -- It's step two. "*Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity*." That one, I just, I, uh...
(strong inhale)
I have some trouble with.

ALI
Oh, oh, okay. All right, all right, I see. Now I get it.
(laughs)
You don't believe there's a power on Earth greater than Rue?

RUE
(scoffs)
That’s not true.

ALI
Really?

RUE
It's not true. I think there's tons of shit that is of greater power than me.

ALI
Name one.

RUE
A Mack truck.

ALI
(whatever)
Uh-huh.

RUE
What?

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ALI
Name another.

RUE
Uh, the ocean.

Ali can’t fucking believe what he’s hearing.

ALI
Try again.

RUE
(laughs, loss for words)
Shit. I would say any song by Otis Redding is of greater power than me.

ALI
(scoffs)
That doesn't make any sense.

RUE
It does. Yeah, it does.

Ali isn’t convinced.

RUE (CONT'D)
It does!

ALI
What?

RUE
The ... The impact that "*Try a Little Tenderness*" had on the world is, is more than I, I could ever do.

RUE (CONT'D)
It's more than probably any of us will ever fucking do.

ALI
Well --

ALI (CONT'D)
All right, all right, all right. Little smart ass. Okay, that's not gonna cut it.

RUE
(scoffs, then dryly:)
Ali, I don't believe in God.

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ALI
Guess what? God doesn't give a fuck if you believe in him. He believes in *you*.

RUE
I don’t know. That, that, that sounds good, but it, it doesn't really mean anything.

ALI
Of course it means something. If God didn't believe in you, you wouldn't even still be breathing.

RUE
So, you're saying the reason my dad died is because God didn't believe in him?

ALI
Rue, uh, that's not what I was saying ...

RUE
There's nothing that makes me angrier than that fucking argument.

ALI
Hey, that's, that's not what I was saying ...

RUE
You know, 'cause every time someone survives, like, a mass shooting or some terrible fucking earthquake, "*I survived for a reason. God saved me for a reason. I have a purpose*."
(scoffs)
And then I think to myself, like, okay, well, what you're saying is that your life is more important than that six-year-old who died that day, or the newborn who died that day, or anybody fucking else who died that day. Your life has a purpose, right? Well, why does your life have a purpose, and my dad's doesn't? Because I could argue that my dad's purpose was to raise me and my sister. To be there for my mom. That was his purpose, I think. But, you know. He's dead.

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ALI
Listen --

RUE
Ali, if you're, if you're about to tell me that he died for a reason, or you know, whatever, I will walk the fuck out.

ALI
I -- I wasn't.

RUE
He didn't die to teach us a lesson. Okay? He didn't die to, you know, have us all come together, or whatever the fuck people tell people when they don't have anything to say. He died because he died. That's it. Same stupid reason I came out of the womb with a couple wires crossed. Right? *Just fucking luck*. You said it. That's it.

ALI
Listen, um... I don't know all the answers. And I'm not gonna pretend to. But I do know that at any given point that we're unable to see and comprehend the overall arc of human life. No person can see it. The whole chain reaction of how things come to be from beginning to end. It's a mystery, and will always remain a mystery. How, um, six-year-old Malcolm Little's daddy was killed in a streetcar accident. Rumor was it that the Black Legion did it. The KKK. How that little boy grew up believing that this white world had no place for a Black man like him, so fuck it. He moves to Harlem, becomes a pimp. Becomes an addict. Starts robbing and stealing, till he gets locked up. Who discovers Islam. Who starts a movement.
(MORE)

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ALI (CONT'D)
Who scares the living shit out of white America so bad that white America was so afraid that they embraced another Negro, one who had a dream, not to cut the head off the snake, even if that's what they deserved, but to live in harmony. Next thing you know, Civil Rights Act. The first legislative steps granting you and I the right to sit in this motherfuckin' diner to have a conversation about whether or not you wanna stay clean from drugs. Drugs that were given to your ancestors to keep them inebriated, inoculated, enslaved. Drugs that stripped them of their ability to not just be free, but to imagine a world in which they were free. So, why is one person's purpose greater than another's? Why are some people struck down while others live? Why are you, Rue Bennett, sitting here when other 17-year-olds, 17-year-olds who are better, who are kinder, who are more respectful than you, aren't sitting here, I don't know. That's the mystery. But here we are. So what now?

RUE
I don't know. Maybe I'll ...
(exhales)
... start a revolution like Malcolm X or something.

ALI
But haven't you heard, man, revolutions are no longer radical.

RUE
(slurring)
What are you talking about?

ALI
There's so many revolutions that everybody's a revolutionary. The rich. The poor. The right. The left. The young. The old. The beggars. The bankers. Man ... is it beautiful. Huh? Everyone all at once, fighting one revolution after another.
(MORE)

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ALI (CONT'D)
I tell ya, I never thought I'd see so many revolutions in my entire life.
(chuckles)
The revolutions are fought and won so damn fast that the people don't even have time to implement change, because have you heard? Huh? There's a *new* revolution.

BEAT

ALI (CONT'D)
I went down to, um, buy me a new pair of kicks at the Nike store the other day. And I look up on the wall, and I see in twenty-foot letters, these words, "*Our people matter*." And I thought, man, this feels good. Here I am, and my favorite shoe store's out here saying, "I know you lived a long life. "And I know that life ain't always been easy, "but here you are, at 54 years old, my brother, and I want to say I love you." And I'm like, man. This feels good. And I'm like, thank you, Nike.

Rue and Ali chuckle.

ALI (CONT'D)
And then I pick up a pair of these sneakers and I look at the price tag, and it says a hundred and thirty-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents. And I'm, like, I thought Nike loved me. Appreciated me and my life. What happened here?
(chuckles)
And I look around the store, and I see a whole bunch of Black people, you know, also feeling good. And I see a whole bunch of white people, too. Also feeling good. Some even, you know, posing. And taking, uh, pictures with the twenty-foot letters on the wall.

Rue laughs, but looks at Ali COCKEYED.

ALI (CONT'D)
And, uh... Shit. Yeah. Yeah. Straight up.
(MORE)

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ALI (CONT'D)
I just had this feeling, and I thought, fuck you, Nike. You don't give a fuck about anything or anyone. Chinese Muslims are sewing these Kaepernick sneakers for seven cents an hour, and you're tellin' me my Black ass matters. Give me a fucking break.

Ali leans in closer to Rue.

ALI (CONT'D)
If rap music wasn't mainstream, if Nirvana was still the most popular band in America, they'd be out here saying, "*Depression Matters*," because that's what would move sneakers. Shit. These advertisers. They're too good.
(chuckles, points to his head)
Uh-huh. And they've outsmarted us. But at the same time, your generation's full of some mark-ass bitches, because they've tapped into your phones.

Again, Rue looks at Ali like he’s a crazy conspiracy theorist.

ALI (CONT'D)
Yeah, yeah. They've read your likes. They've predicted your moves, and trapped yo' asses. You think you out here fighting a revolution, and Bank of America's on your side? Give me a fucking break! Because a true revolution has no allies. It's just that simple. Because a true revolution, not a fast one, not a quick one, not a fashionable one, but a real fucking revolution, is at its core, spiritual. It is a complete decimation of one's priorities, beliefs, and way of living. And reconstruction in the spirit of -- uh -- You have to create a new God. Or gods. Or whatever you can. But it is imperative that you believe in something. Something greater than yourself. All right? And it can't be the ocean, or your favorite song.
(MORE)

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ALI (CONT'D)
And it can't be the movement, or the people, or the words. You've got to believe in the poetry. Because everything else in your life will fail you. Including yourself.

Ali KNOCKS ONCE ON THE TABLE.

ALI (CONT'D)
You hear me? That's where you are. You're sick.
(beat)
Your whole system's on the verge of collapse. And the addict in you is trying to sell you on the same shit that got you sick in the first place. And if you keep going the way you're going, you'll rot from the inside until you cave in and die.
(quietly)
Your only hope is a revolution. But a real fuckin' revolution, inside and out.
(almost whispering)
But you gotta see it through. You can't half-ass this shit. You just have to commit to it, every single day. And know that you can always do it better. And be better.
(normal voice level)
Because who knows? Um ... one day, you might succeed.

Rue, one the verge of tears, is lost in her thoughts. Ali reaches into HIS JACKET POCKET AND PULLS OUT A PACK OF CIGARETTES.

ALI (CONT'D)
I don't underestimate anyone. Uh, stranger things have happened.

Ali gives Rue a smile, then:

ALI (CONT'D)
(holds up the pack)
Be right back. All right?

Ali, grabs his JACKET and heads for the exit.

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EXT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

Ali exits the restaurant PUTTING ON HIS JACKET as he walks to the other side of the parking lot. He wraps a SCARFF around his neck.

INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

Still sitting, Rue takes her PHONE from her POCKET and UNCOILS THE EARBUDS wrapped around it. There's a TEXT MESSAGE FROM JULES:

JULES {HEART} I miss you.

The TIME AND DATE on Rue's phone reads: **7:37 Thursday, December 24.**

Rue TAPS THE TEXT MESSAGE. Jules SHARED A SONG FROM SPOTIFY: **"ME IN 20 YEARS" BY MOSES SUMNEY**.

EXT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

Ali lights the CIGARETTE that's dangling from his lips. He takes a DRAG, EXHALES.

INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

Rue puts in the RIGHT EAR BUD and TAPS PLAY on her phone.

The SONG: **"ME IN 20 YEARS" BY MOSES SUMNEY** plays. Rue HUGS HER LEGS, listening to the music, staring off into nothing. She glances over her shoulder, looking for Ali.

EXT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

SONG CONTINUES.

Ali is MAKING A PHONE CALL. We can OVERHEAR RINGING. ONCE. TWICE. THRICE. Then:

ALI
(surprised)
Oh, hey, hey! Aah.
(slightly embarrassed)
I didn't know you were gonna pick up.
(stammers)
I-I thought I was gonna get your voicemail. Uh... heh.
(beat)
(MORE)

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ALI (CONT'D)
Nah, nah. I'm not... Not trying to guilt trip you. It' just --
(sighs)
It's Christmas. Merry Christmas.

INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

Rue leans back and rests her heads on the bench. She stares at the ceiling.

The SONG CONTINUES.

Over RUE'S SHOULDER, WE CAN SEE ALI IN THE PARKING LOT. Ali is still ON THE PHONE WITH HIS OLDEST DAUGHTER, IMANI.

ALI (O.S.)
(still on phone)
Your sister there? Oh, that's good. That's good.

EXT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

ALI
Tell her I, uh, tell her Merry Christmas for me. And tell her I, I love her. And I miss her very much.
(beat)
No. Nah. I'm not trying to talk to her through you, Imani.
(beat)
That's not what I was try...

He SCRATCHES HIS BROW in frustration - CIGARETTE IN HAND.

ALI (CONT'D)
Right.

INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

SONG CONTINUES.

Rue still sitting, lost in thought. Her HIGH IS WEARING OFF. She's getting sleepy.

ALI (O.S.)
I'm doing good. I'm ... I just came from my meeting. Now I'm standing in the parking lot.

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ALI
Nah, nah, nah. I'm just getting pancakes with a kid I sponsor.

Ali looks OVER HIS SHOULDER and through the WINDOW. Rue's still there, awake.

Ali's attention goes back to his phone.

ALI (CONT'D)
(surprised)
Hey, hey. Hey! Who's this?
(beat)
Rashad!?
(laughs)
Who's *this*?
(points to himself)
It's Poppo! Poppo Ali!
(beat)
Wait, wait, wait. Say it again.
(beat)
Oh, yeah, little man!

This is the first time Ali has spoken to his GRANDSON, RASHAD, in a long time. Ali is almost OVERWHELMED. But he maintains his composure.

ALI (CONT'D)
Oh, oh, hey. Oh, wow.
(so happy)
What a voice he has on him. Right?
(beat)
Wait. How tall is he by now? Is he ... What... yeah. Oh, yeah... Nah.

Now, the disappointment is palpable. Whatever his daughter, Imani, has just said to him, changed his mood.

ALI (CONT'D)
Oh, yeah. No, I, I, I understand. It's not a problem.

INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

Rue hasn't moved much.

The SONG CONTINUES.

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EXT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

ALI
I, I'm all right. I, I just feel like I'm in a... One of them old movies. "*It's a Wonderful Life.*"
(softly)
It's a wonderful life.
(normal level)
Merry Christmas, Imani.

He TAPS THE END CALL BUTTON, lowers the phone from his ear, and just -- stares off into the distance.

SONG FADES OUT.

INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

BOOTH/COUNTER

Rue, EYES CLOSED, still sitting comfortably in the BOOTH. Ali TOSSES HIS JACKET on the bench opposite Rue and slides into his seat. Ali lets out a DEEP SIGH.

RUE
Ali, what am I supposed to do about Jules?

Ali looks OVER HIS SHOULDER to where a WAITRESS, MISS MARSHA (black female, 70s), is SITTING AT THE **COUNTER** TOTALING HER TIPS from the evening.

ALI
Miss Marsha?

She STOPS counting, and faces Ali.

ALI (CONT'D)
Question.

MISS MARSHA
Yes.

ALI
How long you been clean?

She thinks for a moment.

MISS MARSHA
Seventeen years -- by the grace of God.
(beat)
Seventeen years.
(MORE)

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MISS MARSHA (CONT'D)
Never thought I'd be able to say that. But I say it with a lot of pride.

Ali nods heavily.

MISS MARSHA (CONT'D)
Seventeen years.
(beat)
Why?

ALI
What would happen if, uh, you thought about dating in the early stages of you trying to get clean?

MISS MARSHA
You want to know if I was interested in dating, or if I was interested in getting clean? 'Cause the answer is "*yes*" to both of those questions.
(chuckles)
But ... I had to not be in a relationship, so that I could focus on my sobriety. Because that's what I wanted, and I didn't have enough energy for both of those. And I wanted to get clean.

Ali shoots Rue a look.

MISS MARSHA (CONT'D)
Everything that's good *to you* ... ain't always good *for you*.

ALI
What do you have to say to somebody who doesn't have a whole lot of hope?

MISS MARSHA
When I was a little girl growing up, my grandma used to always have this saying, and I never understood what it meant ... until I was ready to get clean. And her words were, "*Baby, trouble don't last always*." And it doesn't ... if you want to make a change. That's up to you.

Rue listens. Fully conscious, but her HIGH is wearing off. Her EYES ARE HEAVY.

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MISS MARSHA (CONT'D)
You got any more questions for me while I'm trying to count my tips?

ALI
Nah, count 'em. Imma throw a couple more in there later.

MISS MARSHA
You need to, with your cheap ass.

Ali laughs. Then he turns and faces Rue.

ALI
That’s the truth right there.

BEAT

BACK TO THE BOOTH

RUE
You know... It's funny, when I think about it. I still blame Jules for all this shit.

ALI
Why?

RUE
'Cause ... I was clean. And I was, like, gonna stay clean. And for the most part, I was pretty happy, so ... And fuckin' Jules ...

ALI
Wait, wait, wait. You were gonna stay clean?

RUE
Yeah.

ALI
With pills in your room?

RUE
I wasn't *taking* them.

ALI
You were saving them.

RUE
Yeah.

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ALI
Even though you just said you were gonna stay clean.

RUE
Uh ...

ALI (CONT'D)
And that relapsing was Jules' fault.

RUE (CONT'D)
Ali, you don't know what she did to me.

ALI
You’re right. I don’t.

RUE
She cheated on me. When I was sober, she literally cheated on me.

ALI
I didn't know that.

RUE
Exactly.

ALI
So, you were in a relationship?

RUE
Yeah.

ALI
I thought you two were just friends?

RUE
No.

ALI
Huh.
(beat)
When did it shift?

RUE
Uh, the night of the carnival, she came over, and we, like, kissed a whole bunch.

ALI
Okay ... but when did it become a relationship?

RUE
I just told you. That night.

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ALI
It became a relationship that night?

RUE
Yeah.

ALI
So it wasn't just kissing. You two talked about being together?

RUE
What? That's so weird.

ALI
What?

RUE
Why would we talk about it?

ALI
Because that's how people get into relationships, Rue. They talk about it.

RUE
(scoffs)
I mean, we said "*I love you*." A lot.

ALI
(so what?)
I say "*I love you*" to my barber.

RUE
Okay, yeah, but you don't make out with your barber.

ALI
Even if I did, my barber might assume it was just a casual thing.

RUE
We talked about getting matching tattoos on the inside of our lips.

ALI
Damn. Did you?

RUE
No, but we, we talked about it.

Ali SCRATCHES his head.

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ALI
Okay.
(laughs)
Keep goin'.

RUE
I mean, there's nothing else to say, you know? Except that I loved her. I trusted her. And when I look back at it, you know, just, it's like she lied to me. And, uh, manipulated me.

ALI
Right.

RUE
Like the whole thing at the train station. Her trying to get me to run away with her, even though I was, um, scared, and... didn't have my medication ... Just kind of fucked up, and selfish.
(beat)
I didn't think she was actually gonna go. You know, like, leave me.
(beat)
It just kind of set something off in my head, you know? Thinking about my whole life, how ... people make all these fucking promises. My mom kissing me on the forehead, and... telling me my dad's gonna be all right. And Jules talking about how we're gonna live together when she goes off to college and sleep in the same bed, and be together forever. And then she ditches me. 'Cause she met another girl. Just ... made me think about how everyone lies. It's not even the lies that hurt, you know? It's the fact that you're never really emotionally prepared for someone to leave you. Just kind of messed up. And it just started, like, this avalanche of shit, about maybe I deserve it. Maybe this is the universe's punishment for me being a piece of shit my entire life. Stealing from my mom. Hitting her in the face.

Rue lets out a BIG EXHALE. Then continues.

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RUE (CONT'D)
That's what I've done, Ali. I have, I have hit my mom in the face.
(beat)
I picked up a piece of glass, and I pointed it at my mom and I threatened to kill her.
(scoffs)
That is some unforgivable shit. Maybe I deserve to get my ass left at a train station at one A.M., you know?

ALI
Drugs change who you are as a person.

RUE
Every time I attacked my mom, I wasn't high

ALI
(more forceful)
Drugs change who you are as a person.

RUE
(whispers)
It's still unforgivable.

ALI
Nah. It's not.

RUE
Come on.

ALI
If I actually believe that what you did was unforgivable, I wouldn't be sitting here, because what I've done in my life, is *way more* unforgivable.

RUE
(chuckles)
Yeah, right. No.

ALI
Ah. I said it before. I'll say it again. You're playing pool with Minnesota Fats.
(MORE)

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ALI (CONT'D)
Maybe if I was some random-ass classmate of yours with no life experience, and I heard that you picked up a piece of glass and threatened your mom, I'd be like, "*Ooh, that's unforgivable*." But the more you believe that, the sicker it makes you, because every time you do something unforgivable, you think, "*Why change? I'm just a piece of shit. I better keep going. What's the difference now?*" Without realizing that *forgiveness* is the key to change. We're too busy running around judging everybody's intentions and motivations as if we have some insight into the human soul. You know, "*You did this, so that must mean you're that.*" Just give me a break.

Rue still believes what she did was so unforgiveable, it needs repeating.

RUE
(slower, like Ali doesn't understand)
Ali, I picked up a piece of glass. I pointed it at my mom. And I told her I was gonna kill her.

Ali still isn't moved.

ALI
Right.

RUE
(quietly)
That's fucking terrible.

ALI
But what's it mean?

RUE
Means that I'm a piece of shit.

ALI
Look deeper.

RUE
I am.

ALI
Nah. You're not. Look deeper.

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RUE
Ali, that sounds like a tag line for a dumb fucking movie.

ALI
So just because it doesn't sound cool enough to you, you're gonna settle for being superficial? *That's* unforgiveable.
(beat)
Look deeper. What's it mean?

RUE
That I'm violent to someone I love.

ALI
Okay, okay. Why?

RUE
(quietly)
Because that's who I am.

ALI
I don't know what that means.

RUE
It means that I'm okay with that.

ALI
Are you?

RUE
That's what it says.

ALI
But are you okay with that?

RUE
No.

ALI
So, it's *not* who you are.

RUE
Yeah, well, I still did it.

ALI
But why are you not okay with it?

RUE
Because it's a terrible fucking thing to do.

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ALI
Why?

RUE
Because it's shitty. It's cruel, and it's mean, and my mom doesn't deserve that.

ALI
Those are all things you believe?

RUE
Yes.

ALI
And your beliefs are part of who you are.

RUE
Yes, of course.

ALI
So what you're saying is, is that you can simultaneously do something that you also believe is wrong?

RUE
(sighs)
Well, doesn't you doing it mean more than your intentions?

ALI
It all depends. Why are you ignoring all the things you believe?

RUE
'Cause I wasn't thinking.

ALI
Okay, but that could just be the struggle of all human beings.

RUE
What?

ALI
Living up to their belief system.

RUE
Not all human beings threaten to kill their mom.

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ALI
True. Yours is more extreme. I'll give you that. But why?

RUE
Why is it more extreme?

ALI
Yeah.

RUE
I don't know. 'Cause of, like, drugs, and ... certain emotional disorders.

ALI
You sure it's that, and not just because you're a terrible person?

RUE (CONT'D)
(chuckles)

ALI (CONT'D)
I mean, 'cause it could just be because you're a piece of shit.

RUE
No. It’s not that.

ALI
I mean, 'cause there's a lot of people with drug issues and emotional issues that don't threaten to kill their mothers.

RUE
Yeah, no. I know.

ALI
But *you* did. And your punishment, the sentence you're giving yourself is that you, Rue Bennett, are beyond forgiveness. *That* punishment is way too harsh, and it's also way too easy. It allows you to keep doing exactly what you're doing without changing, because -- you deserve it. There's no hope. You're beyond forgiveness. So you may as well just fuck the fuck off forever and go down the gutter because that's what *this* girl, *this* piece of shit, deserves. This is why the world keeps getting worse.
(MORE)

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ALI (CONT'D)
People keep doing shit that we deem unforgivable, and in return, they decide there's no reason to change. So now you got a whole bunch of people running around who don't give a fuck about redemption. That's scary.

BEAT

RUE
Ali, what have you done that's so terrible?

ALI
A lot.

RUE
But what? For real.

ALI
A lot.

RUE
You're not just saying that?

ALI
Nah.

RUE
You promise?

ALI
Why do you want to know?

RUE
Because I think you're, like, a good person. And I just couldn't imagine you, like, doing something terrible.

Ali thinks for a moment, then nods.

ALI
I grew up in a house where my dad used to beat on my mama. He was a drunken, cold son of a bitch. And every night, I lay in bed dreaming of every which way to kill him.
(beat)
But eventually, my mama up and left him and took me and my sister with her, and life goes on.
(MORE)

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ALI (CONT'D)
But I always said to myself that no matter how bad shit got, whether I was shooting dope or smoking crack, I would never, ever be like my dad. And then I, I got married. I had two girls. It was chaos. I was using, and my wife wasn't having it. We were fighting every night. And it got physical. And, uh, one night I looked over and I see my two little girls watching. And I thought, here I am, a grown man with two girls, and they just watched me hit their mom in the face. I spent 30 years of my life ... thinking of how to kill my dad for doing the same shit I just did to their mom. That's rock bottom. It doesn't get any worse than that. But, hey, it took me another five years to clean up, because for some people, there is no rock bottom. It's bottomless. And the truth is, drugs will fundamentally change who you are as a human being. Every moral. Every principle. Everything you hold close to your heart, and believe in, will go out the window or down the drain. 'Cause there's no force stronger on planet Earth than that next fix.

Ali leans in a little bit closer to Rue.

ALI (CONT'D)
Now, you may be functioning. Maybe things go well. Maybe they last. And maybe they don't. But the one thing I know is true is that the longer you do drugs, the more you're gonna lose. And not just in terms of the things you love, but the things you *value* about yourself. And every compromise you make, every moral line that you cross, you'll go further and further, until you don't recognize who the fuck you are. And that list of racing thoughts, that list of unforgivable things, it grows longer. And gets uglier.

Ali pauses to let it sink in. Then:

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ALI (CONT'D)
You still think I'm a good person?

Rue and Ali lock eyes. Rue gives a little nod.

RUE
(quietly)
Yeah.

ALI
The thought of *maybe* being a good person is what keeps me *trying* to be a good person.

BEAT

ALI (CONT'D)
Although, some people might disagree with you. My youngest daughter, for one.

RUE
What's her name?

Ali's face softens.

ALI
Marie.

Rue looks TIRED, WORN DOWN. She's on the verge of sobbing.

RUE
Ali?

ALI
Yeah?

RUE
I just don't really plan on being here that long.

Her eyes begin filling with TEARS.

RUE (CONT'D)
And that's, um... That's the tough part about all this, you know? 'Cause, I, I, I love talking to you. I do. And I agree with, um, almost everything you're saying. And I understand it.
(beat)
But, um... I just don't plan on being here that long.

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Ali looks away. He tries to avoid eye contact for the moment.

ALI
I get it. We're living in dark times. Huh. Not a lot of hope out there.

He looks at Rue, making eye contact.

ALI (CONT'D)
The thing I miss about doing drugs ... is the beauty. No matter what's going on in the world, no matter what's going on in your life, everything is gonna be okay.
(smiles)

A momentary SILENCE is broken by Rue’s NEAR-WHISPERED response:

RUE
Yeah. The world's just really fuckin' ugly, you know? It's really fuckin' ugly, and, um ... Everybody seems to be okay with it, you know? The anger. The level of anger. Everyone's just out to make everyone else not seem human. And I don't really want to be a part of it.
(beat)
I don't even want to witness it. Sure, it's not, like, the root of all my problems, but I definitely think about it. A lot.

ALI
Because thinking about those questions, those ideas, they're a large part of, uh... what makes this life worth living. Right?

Ali leans in closer to Rue.

ALI (CONT'D)
That's what I was talking about earlier. You gotta believe in the poetry. The value of two people sitting in a diner on Christmas Eve, talking about life, addiction, loss. You don't want to be a part of it, Rue, because ... you care about the big things in life.

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RUE
I don't know if I care about the big things in life.

ALI
Come on now, of course you do because you obviously don't care about the small things, like being right, or being angry. All the things that kill curiosity and keeps us from ... keeps us *all* from looking deeper.

BEAT

ALI (CONT'D)
You said it earlier. I love talking to you. Because we talk about the real shit. Shit that matters. Like, who do you want to be when you leave this Earth?

RUE
I'm not really sure I follow.

ALI
You said you weren't gonna be here much longer. Okay. Then? How do you want your mom and sister to remember you?

Rue’s face crumples. Her eyes fill with TEARS.

RUE
(voice breaking)
As someone who tried really hard to be someone I couldn't.

Ali and Rue lock eyes. Ali reaches over and places his hand on Rue’s. TEARS FLOW down Rue’s face.

ALI
(quietly)
I got faith in you.

Rue EXHALES SHARPLY, then uses her SLEEVE TO WIPE AWAY TEARS - BARELY KEEPING IT TOGETHER TO SAY:

RUE
(crying)
Why?

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ALI
I don't know. I just do.
(tries to lighten the mood)
Granted, I was a Christian before I became a Muslim, so, I've been wrong before.

Ali chuckles and Rue laughs. She WIPES AWAY TEARS with a smile as her spirits are lifted.

RUE
(sarcastically)
Thanks.
(laughs)

ALI
(laughs)

Rue stares out the window. The RAIN has started, and she has stopped crying.

EXT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - CHRISTMAS EVE - ONGOING

"AVE MARIA" BY LABRINTH plays. It's POURING RAIN. Rue and Ali come out of the diner and jump into Ali's FORD. They EXIT THE PARKING LOT.

I/E. CITY STREET - ALI'S FORD PICK-UP - CHRISTMAS EVE - LATER

AS THE CAMERA SLOWLY ZOOMS-IN TO RUE:

The SONG CONTINUES. The RAIN CONINUES. Not a single word is spoken between Ali and Rue. Ali's focus is on the road ahead. The WIPERS SWISH BACK AND FORTH and Rue just -- just stares BLANKLY. She's lost in thought; halfway between sleeping and dreaming. She seems almost comfortable, RELAXED. HER EYES ARE HEAVY. The wipers are hypnotic.

The RAIN STOPS, but the WIPERS CONTINUE. BACK AND FORTH. BACK AND FORTH. Rue's face intermittently glows in the LIGHTS OF THE PASSING CARS, or from the RED TAIL LIGHTS OF THE TRAFFIC AHEAD.

The SONG CRESCENDOS. The WIPERS CLACK TWO-MORE-TIMES. Then:

CUT TO:

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EUPHORIA

END CREDITS

THE END

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